

Amendments to the Claims

1. (Currently amended) A method for hygienically preparing dried peppers by continuous sterilization and drying processes, comprising:
 - screening fresh peppers, removing the stems of the peppers, and aging the peppers;
 - washing the peppers to remove foreign materials and pesticide residue from the surfaces of the peppers;
 - ~~optionally sterilizing the surfaces of the washed peppers using a chemical sterilant solution~~ using a 0.1-0.5% sodium dichloroisocyanurate solution for at least 1 minute;
 - cutting and separating seeds from the washed or sterilized peppers;
 - sterilizing the cut peppers using a chemical sterilant solution and/or high-temperature and high-pressure steam;
 - drying the sterilized peppers by hot air or freeze-drying; and
 - grinding the dried peppers into a product.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1, before or after aging, after cutting and separating the seeds from the peppers, or after hot air drying, further comprising deep-freezing and storing the peppers.
3. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein deep-freezing and storing the peppers is performed at a temperature of -25 to -40°C for at least 24 hours.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein sterilizing the peppers using the high-temperature and high-pressure steam is performed at a temperature of 90-120°C for 1-10 minutes.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein, when sterilizing the peppers is sequentially performed using the chemical sterilant solution and the high-temperature and high-pressure steam, sterilization using the chemical sterilant solution is performed using a 0.1-0.5% sodium dichloroisocyanurate solution for 5-20 minutes and sterilization using the high-temperature and high-pressure steam is performed at a temperature of 90-120°C for 2-10 minutes.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, between sterilization using the chemical sterilant solution and sterilization using the high-temperature and high-pressure steam, further comprising mixing the sterilized peppers with a sugar solution.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the sugar solution comprises 30-60% by weight of trehalose, 10-40% by weight of dextrin, and 10-40% by weight of purified water, and the sugar solution is added in an amount of 1-10 kg per 20 kg peppers.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein drying the sterilized peppers by hot air comprises a first drying performed at a temperature of 90-110°C and a second drying performed at a temperature of 60-95°C.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein drying the sterilized peppers by freeze-drying is performed at a temperature of 45-70°C for 18-23 hours in a freeze dryer after deep-freezing the sterilized peppers.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
detecting and separating foreign materials from the dried peppers using a laser before grinding the dried peppers; and
separating iron particles from the peppers after grinding the dried peppers.

13. (Withdrawn) An apparatus for hygienically preparing dried peppers by continuous sterilization and drying processes, comprising:
an aging room for screening fresh peppers and aging screened peppers to enhance flavor and color of the peppers;
a washer for washing foreign materials and pesticide residue from the surfaces of the peppers with water;
an optional chemical sterilizer for sterilizing the surfaces of the washed peppers;
a cutter for cutting the washed or sterilized peppers into pieces of a uniform size;
a seed separator for separating seeds from the cut peppers;

a chemical sterilizer and/or a high-temperature and high-pressure steam sterilizer for sterilizing microorganisms existing on the surfaces of and within the peppers;

first and second hot air dryers or a freeze dryer for drying the sterilized peppers; and

a grinder for grinding the dried peppers into a final product,

wherein each unit of the apparatus is connected by a conveyor.

14. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising a deep-freeze reservoir for storing the fresh peppers, aged peppers, cut peppers, or peppers dried by the first dryer.

15. (Withdrawn) The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising:

a laser foreign material detector and separator for detecting and separating foreign materials from the dried peppers before grinding by the grinder;

an iron particle separator for separating iron particles from the peppers after grinding by the grinder; and

a wrapper.

16. (New) A method for hygienically preparing dried peppers by continuous sterilization and drying processes, comprising:

screening fresh peppers, removing the stems of the peppers, and aging the peppers;

washing the peppers to remove foreign materials and pesticide residue from the surfaces of the peppers;

sterilizing the surfaces of the washed peppers using a 0.1-0.5% sodium

dichloroisocyanurate solution for at least 30 seconds;

cutting and separating seeds from the washed or sterilized peppers;

sterilizing the cut peppers using a chemical sterilant solution and/or high-temperature and high-pressure steam;

drying the sterilized peppers by hot air or freeze-drying; and

grinding the dried peppers into a product.

17. (New) A method for hygienically preparing dried peppers by continuous sterilization and drying processes, comprising:

screening fresh peppers, removing the stems of the peppers, and aging the peppers;

washing the peppers to remove foreign materials and pesticide residue from the surfaces of the peppers;

optionally sterilizing the surfaces of the washed peppers using a chemical sterilant solution;

cutting and separating seeds from the washed or sterilized peppers;

sterilizing the cut peppers using a 0.1-0.5% sodium dichloroisocyanurate chemical sterilant solution for 5-20 minutes and high-temperature and high-pressure steam at a temperature of 90-120°C for 2-10 minutes;

drying the sterilized peppers by hot air or freeze-drying; and

grinding the dried peppers into a product.

18. (New) A method for hygienically preparing dried peppers by continuous sterilization and

drying processes, comprising:

- screening fresh peppers, removing the stems of the peppers, and aging the peppers;
- washing the peppers to remove foreign materials and pesticide residue from the surfaces of the peppers;
- optionally sterilizing the surfaces of the washed peppers using a chemical sterilant solution;
- cutting and separating seeds from the washed or sterilized peppers;
- sterilizing the cut peppers using a chemical sterilant solution;
- mixing the sterilized peppers with a sugar solution, wherein the sugar solution comprises 30-60% by weight of trehalose, 10-40% by weight of dextrin, and 10-40% by weight of purified water, and wherein the sugar solution is added in an amount of 1-10 kg per 20 kg peppers;
- further sterilizing the cut peppers using high-temperature and high-pressure steam;
- drying the sterilized peppers by hot air or freeze-drying; and
- grinding the dried peppers into a product.